Pretty big beef; Meat tax would be a disaster for struggling Canadian families

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Body

There's much talk of taxing meat right now as climate activists and policymakers meet in Glasgow, Scotland, for COP26. But the Liberal government said there's no plan to hit Canadians with any such tax.

"This is not something we are considering in Canada," said Joanna Sivasankaran, spokesperson for Environment and Climate Change Minister Steven Guilbeault, in response to an emailed question from the Toronto Sun. This should be welcome news for Canadians who have heard rumblings about such a tax and feared it was coming next to Canada.

While there has been no formal call for such a tax at the COP26 podium from any government in attendance, the idea has been very much present on the sidelines.

"Concerns about the climate crisis are fuelling the meat-tax debate, especially in connection with the Glasgow COP26 environmental summit," explained news site MarketWatch. The article quotes academics and activist groups like PETA that support the implementation of such a consumer-oriented tax.

While transport is credited with causing about 30% of all global CO2 emissions, the livestock sector has been pegged as being responsible for some 10-15% of all global emissions.

With this statistic in mind, some activists lament that the climate conversation hasn't included more discussion of the role agriculture plays in emissions. A meat tax has long been discussed in the feeder system of ideas when it comes to potential climate policies.

It's not only secondary players talking about this possibility, though. One prominent G7 minister was just caught musing about it.

George Eustice, the U.K.'s secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs, told U.K. media the other week - during the lead-up to COP26 - that meat taxes are indeed under consideration. While other U.K. ministers pushed back at their colleague's comment, this could prove to be one of those measures that we'll soon be told is an idea whose time has come - an idea that is unequivocally ruled out one day and then enacted the next.

Besides, Eustice isn't considered much of a climate zealot, so what does that say about the rest of the policymakers and activists in attendance at COP26 if he's talking about it? There's been a lot of concern about what extreme measures would be backed by Guilbeault, who as a climate activist was famously arrested while wearing an orange Greenpeace jumpsuit.

Yet apparently a meat tax is too much even for someone of Guilbeault's enviro street cred. That's good news, although Canadians will need to hold him to it.

Escalating levies

A tax on meat would be devastating to Canadians already struggling with costof-living increases. Statistics Canada's latest numbers on inflation reveal that the price of meat has gone up by about 10% over the last year.

It would go much higher if meat tax advocates get their way.

There are few Canadians who would quibble with a government's attempts to be responsible stewards of the environment. But in recent years, measures have been getting severe.

Canada's original carbon tax is set to keep on increasing and a second overlapping carbon tax - the Clean Fuel Standard - is coming into effect at the end of 2022. These are both adding to Canadians'budgetary woes and it's hard to see how rebates will always keep up pace alongside them.

A meat tax in Canada would be a disaster - both economically and politically. Let's make sure it never comes to pass. *afurey@postmedia.com* @anthonyfurey !@COPYRIGHT=© 2021 Sun Media Corporation. All rights reserved.

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